

producing at least one mild area in the steel sheet product,
the mild area having a hardness substantially less than the
hardness of the ^{hardened} ~~at least~~ a portion of the steel sheet product;
and

forming the at least one mild area in the steel sheet
product.--

--12. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim 11 wherein said step of forming the at least one mild
area in the steel sheet product comprises removing at least a
section of the at least one mild area in the steel sheet
product.--

³--13. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim ²~~12~~ wherein said step of hardening at least a portion of
the steel sheet product to a hardness comprises rapidly cooling
the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--

⁴--~~14~~. The method of making a steel sheet product according
to Claim ³~~13~~ wherein said step of producing at least one mild area
in the steel sheet product comprises preventing the at least one
mild area from rapidly cooling.--

⁵--~~15~~. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim ⁴~~14~~ wherein said step of providing a tool for holding the
steel sheet comprises providing a two-piece tool for holding the
steel sheet.--

⁶--~~16~~. The method of making a sheet steel product according
to Claim ⁵~~15~~ wherein said step of removing at least a section of

the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product comprises machining the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product.--

7 --17. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~16~~⁶ wherein said step of preventing the at least one mild area from rapidly cooling comprises maintaining a distance between the two-piece tool and the at least one mild area in the steel sheet.--

8 --18. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~16~~⁶ wherein said step of preventing the at least one mild area from rapidly cooling comprises providing at least one heat insulating portion in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

9 --19. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~16~~⁶ wherein said step of providing at least one heat insulating portion in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area comprises positioning at least one heat insulating insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

10 --20. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~19~~⁹ wherein said step of positioning at least one heat insulating insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area comprises positioning at least one ceramic insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

11 --21. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~19~~⁹ wherein said step of positioning at least one heat

insulating insert in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area comprises positioning an induction-cooling element in the two-piece tool adjacent the at least one mild area.--

12 --~~22~~³. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~23~~³ wherein said step of producing at least one mild area in the steel sheet product comprises tempering at least one portion of the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--

13 --~~23~~¹³. The method of making a sheet steel product according to Claim ~~22~~¹³ wherein said step of removing at least a section of the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product comprises machining the at least one mild area in the steel sheet product.--

14 --~~24~~¹³. The method of making a sheet steel product according to Claim ~~23~~¹³ wherein said step of providing a tool for holding the steel sheet comprises providing a two-piece tool for holding the steel sheet.--

15 --~~25~~¹⁴. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~24~~¹⁴ comprising the step of removing the steel sheet product from the two-piece tool after said step of tempering at least one portion of the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--

16 --~~26~~¹⁴. The method of making a steel sheet product according to Claim ~~24~~¹⁴ comprising the step of removing the steel sheet product from the two-piece tool before said step of tempering at least one portion of the at least a portion of the steel sheet product.--